**Armour of God**

**Discussion Summary, Notes and Presentation**

**For February 27, 2019**

**Presentation:**

Education: Catholic Problem? Catholic Solution.

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Good evening everyone, my name is TJ Stevens. Tonight, I would like

to discuss education with you. Before I jump in to that broad and often

brooding topic I will give you a bit of background on myself.

I am a Catholic man who converted 8 years ago this Easter. Prior to that I was

nothing really, I was raised to be a good person. Religion was something

to do when I was visiting my grandparents in the summer or when

someone died but otherwise it just wasn’t a part of my life. I am a father of

three young child, a 6 year old boy, a 4 year old girl, and an almost 6

month old boy. I have been married to my wife for nearly 8 years. She

brought me into the Church and there is no greater gift that she could have

given me. My wife also homeschools my two oldest and honestly I don’t

know how she does it. I am a high school teacher and teaching little ones

takes a special kind of patience that God has decided was not necessary

for me at the moment. Finally, I am Headmaster of Chesterton Academy of

Ottawa.

I will talk a bit about my journey there in a moment but I just would

like to point out one thing. The order that I described myself is actually

relevant. I am a Catholic first, a father and husband second, and educator

third. I believe that these three parts of my life are the cornerstones to

answering the problems that we have in our country and in many countries

around the world.

Faith, family, and education. As many of you would agree, we live in

a world that have attempted to become God-less. Many people say that

we have turned away from God but I do not think that is the case. Many

people have not turned away but are openly attacking God and His

people. Why is that? What is the root cause of the vitriol that some many

have towards, specifically, Catholicism? I think that the other two pillars

that make up my life, family and education, are the same reasons the Faith

is under attack. Family dynamics are not what they used to be, anyone

with access to information through television or the internet can see that.

This is not my field of expertise so I will leave that to someone better

prepared to discuss that in a future talk perhaps.

What I do have experience and knowledge on is education so I will focus on that.

Pope Saint John Paul the Great said in a conference on Catholic

education, “In order that the Catholic school and the Catholic teachers

may truly make their irreplaceable contribution to the Church and to the

world, the goal of Catholic education itself must be crystal clear. Beloved

sons and daughters of the Catholic Church, brothers and sisters in the

faith: Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ,

of helping to form Christ in the lives of others”

If we have a desire for developing the Faith in our children we need to surround them with the Faith. The Faith must be an integral part of all that we do. When we start to

look at the body of knowledge of the world from a Catholic perspective we

can begin to truly see the workings of Christ in the world. Somehow the

culture has got this backwards. Many believe that faith and reason are

opposed. God is pure logic, pure reason. Faith and reason are not

opposed as is touted so often today, faith is reason.

If any of you have sent your children to a private, Catholic school or

homeschooled your children you have probably had some interesting

conversations about the ways in which we indoctrinate our children. The

argument I see constantly is that we whitewash knowledge to make sure

that our children grow up with the same beliefs as us. To this point I have

two things to say.

Firstly, what could possibly be more important than Truth? We are here for the praise and glory of God. Full stop. There is nothing else of importance.

Secondly, let’s look at the word indoctrinate. Merriam-Webster defines it as “to imbue with a usually partisan or sectarian opinion, point of view, or principle”. Will someone please explain to me how this is not happening within the public school system?

In what amazing system is their unbiased facts presented because in my

years in school as a student and as a teacher it is certainly not here in

Canada.

Now, at this juncture I would like to introduce my school, Chesterton

Academy of Ottawa, and how I came to be there. We are a classical

education school that is founded on the principle that there is no other

way to learn than through the Truth. History has given us many great

thinkers and many great teachers and at Chesterton Academy we learn

from them. Pope Benedict the 16th has said that “A good school provides

a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school,

over and above this, should help all its students to become saints”. Our

goal is to educate the whole person, academically with our high quality

and strongly faithful curriculum, creatively through our art and music

programs, and spiritually throughout all of our courses, particularly

theology and philosophy, and through daily Mass. We educate not based

on the flippant culture of today but on the great tradition of our Faith.

As G.K. Chesterton once said “Tradition means giving votes to the most

obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead.

Tradition refused to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those

who merely happen to be walking about”. What I find wonderful about

this quote is that we can see today, if you open a newspaper or check out

CBC that the oligarchy of the living is attempting to destroy the democracy

of the dead. By virtue of being a confirmed Catholic, we are the soldiers

that are meant to defend this democracy. And what better place to defend

our Faith and raise our children to be even stronger defenders of the Faith

than here in Ottawa, not far from Parliament Hill, where truth and

knowledge are often tossed out the window.

My story of coming to Chesterton Academy is the story of my

journey to truly believing that God has a purpose for us. For the past 6

years I lived and worked in a small Inuit community on the northern tip of

Quebec. We were seasonal Catholics by necessity as there was no church

within a few hundred kilometres. While this was hard, it did force my wife

and I to develop our domestic church and I think it really strengthened our

faith.

During the last couple years my son was old enough to start school

but the public program was taught exclusively in Inuttitut at the younger

grades so that was not an option for us. My wife started to homeschool at

that point and it was working quite well. My last year there I was beginning

to lose faith in the public system. Almost every decision that was made

seemed to be contradictory to the good of the students I was teaching.

We decided that we would pray for God to show us what we were meant

to do next and did He ever.

Everything that could go wrong in a public school started to go wrong, from the top directors down to the students and it seemed like no one at the school board level had a problem with this. Fortunately for us, the Board of Directors at Chesterton Academy

asked my sister in law if she would be interested in being Headmaster and

she turned them in my direction. This would have been May and if this was

to happen I would need to resign my position, packing all my belongs, and

move a few thousand kilometres by mid-June. No problem, what’s a few

sleepless nights and grey hairs?

Well the problem was this, I had to do all this without knowing if the school was going to actually start. I had no guarantees because we did not have the money needed yet to start. So my decision broke down to this; take a chance that we would start in

September and if it didn’t work I would be homeless and jobless and have

a wife who is 7 months pregnant at the time with my two other small

children or move to another northern community where the school board

has told me that the only position they have for me would be as basically a

teaching assistant after 6 years as teacher and months of principal work.

More sleepless nights and more grey hairs. But I decided to take my

chance and trust in God. I wrote my resignation letter and before sending

it I asked God to do what He wants with me. 10 days later the money

came in that we needed to start. Now the hard part was done and I just

had the easy task of starting a school. God did everything that needed to

be done to bring me here.

Before I jump into some numbers I would like to first state that I am

biased. How I interpret these numbers will be different than someone who

has no faith or has much more trust in government institutions than I do.

Where I see success, they may see failure. The Fraser Institute shared a

study that was released last year showing that across all 10 provinces

enrolment in the public school system is down. Of course not all of these

students have moved into private, Catholic schools but the trend does tell

us something. It tells us that there is a flaw in the public system that is

becoming more and more apparent to Canadians. What is this flaw? I put

forward that this flaw is the lack of reason in our current public school

system. Students are told what to think and spew back out on the test.

Critical thinking and logic are replaced with rote memorization and

authoritarian acceptance.

Chesterton Academy has not forgotten what the purpose of education is, we have decided that the classical approach to education is the most successful approach to education. We work to make our students grow as Truth seekers and Truth speakers and as men and women of virtue and charity. Those of us in the Catholic education field do not expect it to be easy. We are not making model citizens who will accept

the current fad of the day. We are working at making theologians,

philosophers, intellectuals who can and should call out the logical fallacies

that are pushed in contemporary society. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of

John, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because

you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the

world hates you”. We are not called to be Canadians or global citizens,

we are called to be Catholics. Faith, family, and education is how we

achieve that. 6 John 15:19

Now that is all that I have to say at the moment on Catholic

education and our desperate need to support and promote it in our

culture. My talk, which includes relevant links, will be made available. If

any one has any questions about Chesterton Academy, Catholic

education, or just the education system in general, please feel free. I will

answer to the best of my abilities.

Discussion Questions

1) What is the role of the private sector in influencing the public sector?

Should we be taking an active role in trying to improve the public

system or should we worry about ourselves?

2) I often hear the argument that by putting our children in public schools

they can be witnesses to the Faith but rarely hear of success stories.

Are most children prepared for the onslaught against their faith that

they will receive in the public schools and how can we help those

children?

3) What should be done with the public, Catholic system

**Armour of God notes on Discussion**

* + The order of his introduction is important – faith, family, then school – these are the cornerstones to solving many societal problems.
	+ Pope JPII – Catholic schools and teachers must have a clear goal: a quest to communicate Christ and form His life in others – surrounding our children with lived faith .
	+ Many schools are Catholic in name only – looking at the world, we can see Christ working in it even though people say faith and reason don’t mix – faith IS reason, and Chesterton is built around that – we know what we know because of God.
	+ Catholic schools as indoctrination – no way! What could be more important than Truth and passing on Truth? We are made for God.
	+ Indoctrination is a feature of all school systems because all of them have a worldview – is the Catholic view or the world’s view more important?
	+ Chesterton is a classical education school – no other way to learn but Truth – classes are integrated and oriented towards truth.
	+ Benedict XVI – a good Catholic school should educate the whole person and help students to become saints.
	+ Features: theology, philosophy, arts, daily Mass
	+ Our goal is not easy – curriculum is challenging – students embrace faith and want to grow in it.
	+ Education is based on the great tradition of our faith – GK Chesterton’s “democracy of the dead” – our ancestors are worth listening to, but some living people want to destroy their tradition.
	+ Stevens drawn to Chesterton after coming to believe life has purpose – teaching in Nunavut – “seasonal Catholics” due to distance of nearest Church – son started school, was homeschooled.
	+ Stevens raised in public system – not only is it anti-Truth, but anti-real progress – no critical thinking.
	+ The curriculum is ‘unapologetically Catholic” – teachers and students are all Catholics – aiming for saints, not just model citizens.
	+ There’s a flaw in the public system, which Stevens describes as a lack of reason (instead, passive acceptance). Stevens’ antidote – truth, virtue, charity, faith
	+ We are called to be Catholics, not citizens of the world!
	+ Chesterton is based out of St. George’s parish in the west end – it can hold 10 more students (for a total of 3 full classes) and the church is paid rent – this school is part of a network – there are a dozen affiliated schools in the US and Italy. Bishop Prendergast is supportive of the endeavour.
	+ Stevens did not go through the government-run Catholic system here – you can opt out of anything faith-based that you find objectionable, or so he’s heard.
	+ A group seeing a gap in Catholic education created a board – school was formed in about 1/3 of the time compared to its affiliates – funding comes from donations and community support.
	+ Dr. John Gay is former president of the Chesterton Society – he was inspired to bring the Chesterton system here.
	+ The school has two French programs – literature for immersion/advanced students, and French language.
	+ Can Chesterton students get into universities? Stevens wants to use SAT or Classical Learning Test as proof of completion – American Chesterton schools score well above average on SATs.
	+ Chesterton Academy will cover up to Grade 12 in the next two years – right now, they have Grade 9-10.
	+ Is Chesterton connected to other local private schools? Sort of – we can’t change the program, but we do want to get to know each other / Maryvale is not necessarily the only feeder school.
	+ How does tuition work? For 1 student, $7500 per year – working on bursary fund (i.e. loans that don’t have to be paid back) and dinner fundraiser in May / parents with multiple children may be able to have sliding scale fees.
	+ Is there room for a school choice/voucher system in Ontario? As of right now, nothing exists. There is no **major** movement towards making one, but a few schools in Toronto want to make it happen.
	+ The board’s responsibility is to raise money – we have to pay teachers and keep the school running – no one will be turned away, and we want to help families who can’t afford regular fees
	+ We’re not sure about taking over a building from a school that is closing. Is there a political will for a semi-private Catholic school system with shared buildings? We want to keep the government’s hands away from our school!
	+ Has the school faced political pressure to close? Not yet – we’re small enough to go unnoticed.
	+ What about the Academy turns reluctant students into excited ones? Adjustment on the students’ part, personal growth, and excitement of/desire for change. A smaller school has helped the current students grow close to each other.
	+ Most teachers are volunteers with prior public or private teaching experience, maybe certified in another province – they are experts in their field, like art, history, or theology. Staff bios are available online.
	+ Is there a way to support Chesterton with prayer? Yes, and Chestertonians also attend daily Mass themselves!
	+ The math program has a logical, classical foundation that starts with basic questions. Geometry starts with “What is a point? What is a line?”
	+ What about careers that do not allow faith in public? Can current students aspire to those careers? We want students to be creative thinkers, not mindless drones. We want them to keep and work with their faith.